

CERTIFICATE OF FINDINGS
Section 94, Coroners Act 2006

IN THE MATTER of Rua TANGIMAMA

The Secretary, Ministry of Justice, Wellington

As the Coroner conducting the inquiry into the death of the deceased, after considering all the evidence admitted to date for its purposes, and in the light of the purposes stated in section 57 of the Coroners Act 2006, I make the following findings:

Full Name of deceased:	Rua TANGIMAMA
Late of:	Caravan 13 22 Sloss Road Tokoroa
Occupation:	Unemployed
Sex:	Male
Date of Birth:	14 May 1971
Place of Death:	Caravan 13 22 Sloss Road Tokoroa New Zealand
Date of Death:	27 June 2018
Cause(s) of Death	
(a). Direct cause:	Acute pulmonary oedema
(b). Antecedent cause (if known):	Left ventricular failure
(c). Underlying condition (if known):	Ischaemic heart disease
(d). Other significant conditions contributing to death, but not related to disease or condition causing it (if known):	As noted by the pathologist, the presence of synthetic cannabis in the blood could have been a significant provoking factor in the cause of Mr Tangimama's death.

Circumstances of death:

The circumstances of Rua Tangimama's death are set out in my written findings dated this 13th day of March 2019.

Prohibition Publication

Pursuant to section 74 of the Coroners Act 2006, I prohibit the making public of the following:

- (i) The photographs, forming part of the evidence.
- (ii) The addresses, telephone numbers, e-mail addresses (where applicable) of persons who have provided signed statements in evidence.

Signed at Rotorua on 13th day of March 2019.



Coroner Wallace Bain

**THE OFFICE OF THE CORONER
AT ROTORUA
(In Chambers)**

IN THE MATTER of the Coroners Act 2006

AND

**IN THE MATTER of an Inquiry into the
death of RUA TANGIMAMA**

Before: Coroner Wallace Bain

Date of Findings: 13 March 2019

**FINDINGS OF CORONER WALLACE BAIN
(IN CHAMBERS)**

I record I opened an inquiry. I decided pursuant to section 80 of the Coroners Act 2006 not to hold an inquest for the purposes of my inquiry because the death was not one in official custody and care, and I have also complied with the requirements of section 77 of the Coroners Act 2006 and have received no notification from any person of an intention to give evidence in person.

INTRODUCTION

[1] This Inquiry concerns a death from smoking synthetic cannabis as one of the factors.

ISSUES

[2] What has been the effect of smoking synthetic cannabis?

[3] I have considered all available evidence including:

- Police reports to the Coroner
- ESR toxicology report
- Post-mortem report
- Witness statements

[4] I am satisfied that all the elements of the “first purpose” of an inquiry set out in section 57 (2) Coroners Act 2006 have been established.

[5] I am satisfied that the requirements of section 77 (hearings on papers and chambers findings) have been satisfied without holding an inquest. In particular, I am satisfied that persons from whom evidence is generally to be heard for the purposes of an inquiry do not wish to give evidence in person for the purposes of the inquiry. I am also satisfied that notice has been given of my proposal to make a hearing on the papers and make chambers findings to member of the immediate family of the deceased, who concur in the inquiry being concluded on the papers by way of chambers findings.

MATERIAL FACTS

[6] Police conducted an inquiry into a sudden death of Rua Tangimama, at Tokoroa on 27 June 2018. A post mortem examination was authorised.

[7] The police established that Mr Tangimama was 47-years-old and resided at a motor camp in Tokoroa with his partner.

[8] They reconstructed the events and concluded that sometime during the afternoon of the 27 June 2018, the deceased and his partner smoked synthetic cannabis together before falling asleep. At approximately 8.30pm, his partner woke to find Mr Tangimama lying on the floor of the caravan. She did not disturb Mr Tangimama and she left to visit with her brother, who also resides at the campsite. She returned fifteen minutes later and tried to wake him but he was unresponsive. She ran back to get her brother to help and they called an ambulance, but he never regained consciousness.

[9] Police report there were no suspicious circumstances surrounding the death.

[10] The pathological findings as to the cause of death were acute pulmonary oedema, left ventricular failure and ischaemic heart disease. However, the pathologist commented that it was possible the presence of synthetic cannabis in the blood could have been a significant provoking factor in the cause of death.

[11] Toxicology report confirmed THC as a positive result for cannabis. It also confirmed the presence of 5F-ADB acid. That is a metabolite of the synthetic cannabinoid. The ESR have reported to a number of Coronial cases since mid-2007 and it is considered to be a dangerous synthetic cannabinoid.

[12] There have been a number of Coronial Hearings in respect of deaths associated with synthetic cannabis. Coroner Robb issued detailed written Findings in terms of the death of Isaiah Terry McLaughlin in October 2018 and also, Shannon Coleman-Fallen. Those are very thorough Findings and have analysed the effects of the synthetic cannabinoid.

[13] I concur with the Comments and Recommendations from Coroner Robb in the McLaughlin Findings.

Are there any comments or recommendations concerning this death that may, if drawn to public attention, reduce the chances of death in similar circumstances?

[14] The dangers of consuming synthetic drugs include:

- It is promoted or sold as a form of synthetic cannabis, but that there is no cannabis in the product.
- The synthetic drug can be made to look like cannabis by using dried plant or other material but it is saturated in a synthetic drug not THC (tetrahydrocannabinol) the active ingredient in cannabis.
- The pharmaceutical agents from which synthetic cannabis was developed were attempts to create new medications to treat spasms and epilepsy but were found to be unsuitable and were discarded. The nature of the synthetic drug is unknown to the purchaser and unknown or poorly understood by the manufacture/distributors in New Zealand.
- The synthetic drugs, AMB-FUBINACA and 5F-ADB, have been the cause or contributing factor in a number of deaths in both the Waikato/BOP¹, elsewhere in New Zealand, and overseas²
- The quantity and strength of AMB-FUBINACA and 5F-ADB is an unknown gamble which can have fatal consequences.

¹ McAllister, C SU-2017-HAM-000336, Taoho, CSU-2017-ROT-000345, Coleman-Fallen CSU-2017-ROT-000401

² Adams AJ, Banister SD, Irizarry L, Trecki J, Schwartz M and Gerona R. " "Zombie" outbreak Caused by the Synthetic Cannabinoid AMB-FUBINACA in New York" New England Medical Journal 376 (2017) 235-242

Hasegawa K, Wurita A, Minakata K, Gonmori K, Yamagishi I, Nozawa H, Watanabe K and Suzuki O. "Identification and quantitation of 5-fluoro-ADB, one of the most dangerous synthetic cannabinoids, in stomach contents and solid tissues of a human cadaver and in some herbal products" Forensic Toxicology 33 (2015) 112121

- Individuals who fall unconscious after consumption of synthetic drugs can die if they do not receive timely and appropriate medical assistance, dying from cardiac event induced by consumption of the drug, or as a result of being comatose and asphyxiating on their own vomit, or they may suffer an hypoxic brain injury.

[15] Due to the circumstances and cause of this death, I concur with the recommendations made by Coroner Matenga, in reliance on the expert evidence of Dr Quigley, in the Coronial Inquiry into the death of McAllister, CSU-2017-HAM-000336.

- 1 *In order to prevent future deaths from synthetic cannabinoids, Dr Quigley suggested that an all-encompassing harm reduction approach which reduces demand, supply and easy access to treatment for those seeking assistance should be developed. He cautioned that any recommendations on increasing enforcement, targets manufacture, trafficking and supply, while not overly penalising users as this can create a barrier to those seeking medical attention, even in cases of emergency. I agree with Dr Quigley, however I am unable to make any recommendations in this regard, as I have not heard any evidence. I am aware however, that Coroner McDowell is conducting a joint inquiry into deaths from synthetic cannabis which occurred in Auckland. I will refer this suggestion to Coroner McDowell to consider in the course of her joint inquiry. No recommendations will be made by me.*
- 2 *Dr Quigley submitted that efforts should be made to inform users of synthetic cannabis, their families and associates, of the dangers of synthetic cannabinoids and the need to get help immediately if someone collapses. I agree.*
- 3 *Dr Quigley's advice for the families or associates of synthetic cannabis users was that if a person who has used synthetic cannabis collapses, that person should be immediately shaken to attempt to rouse that person. If the person rouses, that person should then be placed in the recovery position and a call for help should be made. If the person does not rouse, then call for help and commence chest compressions. The call taker who answers the emergency call for help will provide assistance. Do not delay.*

[16] Dr Quigley is a vocational specialist in Emergency Medicine, he has completed additional studies in clinical toxicology and conducted research in forensic toxicology. He is a recognised expert in emergency management and treatment of drug and alcohol presentations.

[17] I endorse Dr Quigley's advice.

FINDINGS

[18] I, Wallace Bain, Coroner at Rotorua, HEREBY CERTIFY pursuant to section 94 of the Coroners Act 2006 and having considered all the information available for the purposes of the inquiry into the death of the said deceased and for the purposes of section 57 of the said Act I find:

[19] **Rua Tangimama**, died at Tokoroa on 27 June 2018, his cause of death being acute pulmonary oedema, left ventricular failure, ischaemic heart disease, but as noted by the pathologist, the presence of synthetic cannabis in the blood could have been a significant provoking factor in the cause of Mr Tangimama's death.

[20] Pursuant to section 74 of the Coroners Act 2006, I prohibit the making public of the following:

- (i) The photographs forming part of the evidence.
- (ii) The addresses, telephone numbers, e-mail addresses (where applicable) of persons who have provided signed statements in evidence.

Signed by the Coroner at Rotorua this 13th day of March 2019



Coroner Wallace Bain

Regional Coroner - Bay of Plenty